



Tech. Sgt. Hector Barrios receives hyperbaric-oxygen therapy in September 2003 to treat a foot

injury he received while deployed supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Re-enlistment marks milestone for accident victim

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. — It was a special day for Tech. Sgt. **Hector Barrios** when he re-enlisted in the Air Force recently.

While a re-enlistment itself is not an unusual event, getting there was for the 96th Security Forces Squadron dog handler.

On July 15, 2003, Sergeant Barrios was deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom. While on gate-guard duty, he moved some wire strung to a concrete barrier to permit a vehicle to drive through a makeshift gate. As the truck cleared the barrier, it caught the wire, causing the two-ton barrier to fall on

Barrios' left leg and foot.

Sergeant Barrios faced an 18-month struggle of amputation, reconstruction and infections before he gained his medical clearance to remain in the Air Force and in a job he loved. Now his gear includes two prostheses — one for walking and one for running.

Initially, all the bones in his foot were broken. Doctors said that drastic measures were needed, including hyperbaric oxygen chamber treatments and amputation of most of the damaged foot.

"The doctors told me they would have to amputate my leg from the knee down," Sergeant Barrios said. "When I woke up, I only lost half of my foot, which [makes it] better for me to get around."

Sergeant Barrios said it was rough emotionally after the amputation, but

his family, the base hospital staff, physical therapists, his unit Airmen and fellow dog handlers took care of him.

It was especially difficult not knowing whether he would be able to continue his career after investing 14 years.

"You have to be positive — otherwise it doesn't do any good. I was always trying to stay positive," he said.

Sergeant Barrios said he has reached his main goal of staying in the Air Force for six more years and his experience shows what can be accomplished, "if you put your mind to something."

Now, with the help of a special prosthesis, he can run a 10-minute mile.

*Lois Walsh
96th Air Base Wing Public Affairs*